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A Reversal In Nicaragua

Instead of rallying Congress to the Nicaraguan free
doxi fighters, President Reagan's sulturous rhetoric for
the contras has set the scene for his administration's de-
feat; and a reversal in the rising tide of American world
prestige. Reazanite hard-liners are desperately looking
for some way to turn the pde and persuade the Senate
and House to restore \$14 million of "covert" CIA aid to
the freedom fighters. But like liberals and other anti-con-
trat forces, the Reazanites see small prospect of vic-
tory when the president calls for the vote.

That has caused consternation among some of Re-
agan's best friends. They are growing critical of Secretary
of State George Shultz, whose strong language support-
ing the freedom fighters contrasts strangely with his dip-
lomatic approaches to the Sandinist regime.

These people foresee major political repercussions
throughout the hemisphere: reinforcement of Sandinist
rule in Nicaragua, intimidation of Costa Rica and Hon-
duras, confirmation of Fidel Castro's communist power in
the Western Hemisphere, loss of U.S. credibility marking
the end of a period of relative dynamism in U.S. foreign
policy in the East-West struggle.

No matter how displeasing this prospect for their

nation may be to liberal Democrats, their concern is
not sufficient for them to support the embarrassingly
exposed CIA "covert" war against the Sandinists.
Nor will liberals countenance any switch to private
financial aid for the contras or any effort to get help
from Israel or other third countries.

A less predictable reaction is building among Repub-
lican conservatives. They know that if the Sandinists tri-
umphantly consolidate their power because of the
failure of four years of major effort by the Reagan ad-
ministration, every Latin American country—Mexico
included—may soon find itself up against the cutting
edge of communist power.

Such concerns were unveiled in a private luncheon talk
here this week to foreign policy hard-liners by Malcolm
Wallop, one of the Republican senators best informed on
foreign policy. Wallop noted that Sen. George Humphrey
had asked Shultz at a recent Armed Services Committee
hearing to explain how the United States could possibly
negotiate any "mutually advantageous agreement" with
a Soviet government "whose behavior is indistinguish-
able from that of Nazi Germany." Wallop said that Shultz
refused to take the question seriously.

Such hard-liners believe an unfavorable vote by Con-
gress should be followed up by Shultz with action along
the lines of his Feb. 22 speech in San Francisco. Shultz
said then that if Congress refused to restore the CIA aid,
it would have the effect of "consigning Nicaragua to the
endless darkness of communist tyranny" and lead the
United States "down a path of greater danger."

But what is Shultz's plan to avert that catastrophe if
CIA funding is denied by Congress? If such a plan ex-
ists, it is one of the few secrets left in government.

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